

Building a Strong Foundation

Dear Parent/Caregiver:

Today in our speech session, your child completed the attached worksheet, *I Have Great Things to Say!* This is the first step in teaching your child that others want to hear the things they have to say, and this is why others ask them to repeat or rephrase what they say when they are unclear. Most likely, your child is growing weary of others' requests for repetition. Your child may even think that the problem is not with their speech, but with the listener's ability to listen. We are going to work with them to help change that perception.

If you have ever tried to learn a new habit and have had well-meaning friends or family members remind you about it, try to recall how difficult it can be and how weary you can grow of the reminders. A child's ability to self-monitor is by nature less developed than that of an adult. Multiply the reminders you received times five, and think how frustrated your child may feel!

Why do others remind a child to speak more slowly or to repeat what they've said? Often because they are interested in the content. Imagine that you are walking in the supermarket and someone offers to sell you something you are not interested in. Even if you don't understand every word, you know by their body language what they are asking. You walk on, ignoring or refusing their request to talk further. If your friend were to ask you, "What did that person say?" you might respond, "I don't know." You didn't ask for more information because you didn't want to know.

Why do we ask for more information from our children? Because we are interested in what they have to say! But somehow the child misses this.

To change this, you can start today by telling your child that we are asking them to repeat or clarify because we are interested. This is one approach. But this approach is only words. A more effective approach would be to show them that this is really true. You can start showing your child you want to hear their message by doing the following on a daily basis:

1. Find one positive thing a day that your child has said, and let them know how happy you are about it. These can be small examples. Your child may tell you a new fact they learned in school. You can respond, "I never knew that. I love when you teach me new things!" Or maybe your child will tell you something they did at school or with a friend. You can respond, "That's really interesting! I love to hear about the things you and John do together!" In these types of examples, if you follow up with questions or comments that show that you were listening, it goes a long way toward showing your child that what they have to share is valuable. If you are *consistent* with these types of comments, you will see your child respond by sharing more and more with you.
2. When your child asks or tells you something that is unclear, respond with a reminder that first and foremost tells them that you are interested, for example, "I know you are trying to ask me for something, and I really want to know what it is. I'm having a little trouble understanding you. Can you try it again?"

You may be thinking to yourself, "But my child needs to understand that they have the problem, and that it is their responsibility to fix it." That is true, yes, and we will work toward increasing their understanding and responsibility. For now, we need to first help them build this very important foundation so that they will be more receptive to the cues that will come later.

Please feel free to contact me with any questions.

Sincerely,

Speech–Language Pathologist

Phone